



Higher Education
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"Polytechnics" in Higher Education Systems: A Comparative Review and Policy Implications for Ontario (Dr. Bruce Doern, July 2008)

"Polytechnics" in Higher Education Systems: A Comparative Review and Policy Implications for Ontario seeks to critically examine the experiences of selected higher education jurisdictions with polytechnic education through a literature review of relevant developments in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Finland and Canada (specifically British Columbia, Alberta and New Brunswick). Insights from this analysis are then applied to Ontario to determine potential key policy options for and implications of polytechnic education within the province.

This environment scan reveals substantial differences in both the form of and experience with polytechnic education between each case study. It also reveals that polytechnic education is correlated with improvements in the accessibility of higher education systems, including increased enrolment and the provision of a greater variety of educational pathways for students. However, Dr. Doern cautions that in the absence of a systematic empirical study, it is difficult to ascribe credit for increases in enrolment or improved access to the creation of polytechnic institutions alone. Further research in this area is needed.

Dr. Doern concludes his paper by stating several policy options for Ontario, including the introduction of more polytechnic education into existing institutions, converting several Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) into polytechnics, or encouraging greater university-college collaboration to create polytechnic programs. The paper also highlights important areas for additional research:

- A more thorough exploration of the issues surrounding polytechnics in the Ontario context;
- The likely medium-term needs of the provincial economy for higher-technology focused skills;
- A better understanding of the aspirations, capacities and plans of CAATs currently lobbying for polytechnic status;

- The implications for CAATs that deliver applied degree programming but are not designated CAATs; and
- The precise performance criteria and accountability mechanisms needed to support polytechnic institutions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Bruce Doern is a professor in the School of Public Policy and Administration at Carleton University. Dr. Doern's research interests include Canadian and comparative public policy, including governance institutions and processes in different policy and regulatory fields. He is currently the director of the Carleton Research Unit on Innovation, Science and Environment (CRUISE).